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The Harm Principle

“The only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.”

--John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*



When is it justifiable to restrict individual freedom?

- When action or decision places another individual at substantial risk of serious harm
- Restriction of freedom must be effective in preventing that harm
- No less restrictive alternative exists that would be equally effective at preventing the harm



When can state action be justified?

- “Harm Principle”: State intervention (coercive) may be justified when the individual decision or action places others at substantial risk of serious harm.
- State action must be effective in preventing the harm.
- No other options less intrusive to individual liberty are available